Talking the talk: Oracy demands in first year university assessment tasks

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Abstract: With more constructivist approaches to learning in higher education and more value on teamwork skills, students' oracy (speaking and listening) features more prominently in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The paper reports on a study of two first-year Australian university courses in disciplines with explicit industry orientations and high proportions of international students. Drawing on classroom observations and interviews with the lecturers, this paper investigates their pedagogical designs on oracy and the oracy demands of their assessment tasks. The study found that talk-based assessment tasks (a group project and a group oral presentation) featured in both courses but the two courses treated students' oracy differently: as product or process. The contrast between the two assessment designs explicates issues around EAL student needs, authentic links to industry, the provenance of criteria used to assess performance, perceptions about the relevance of talk and the 'hidden assessment' of oracy.

Keywords: oracy; assessment; groupwork; higher education; EAL students.

Research problem

Australian universities' statements of 'graduate attributes' increasingly include a focus on spoken communication skills (expressed as *'oral skills' ' speaking and listening skills'*, *'effective use of oral ... means'*) and the capacity to work collaboratively (expressed as *'cooperation'*, *'teamwork'*, *'interacting with others'*). Alongside these emerging priorities, lecturing is being redefined as teaching, with an emphasis on social constructivist approaches built from Vygotskian principles. Where constructivism promotes the active construction of knowledge through deliberate cognitive effort by the individual (Phillips 1995), learning in

the social constructivist frame is understood to be 'centred on its social, intersubjective nature … the emphasis is on the process of knowledge construction by the social group and the intersubjectivity established through the interactions of the group' (Au 1998, 298). Where traditionally the lecturer was the expert, who in the monologic lecture bestowed knowledge that was then explored in guided tutorial discussion, the 'new orthodoxy' (Hodson & Hodson, 1998, p. 33) of social constructivist pedagogies cast the university 'teacher' and students in more interactive and mutual 'knowledge building' roles, for example, in interactive lectures (Doherty 2010) and groupwork.

Another trend shaping higher education is the search for more 'authentic' forms of assessment. Authentic assessment aims to 'replicate or simulate actual "tests" in the workplace, personal life and civic life' (Janesick 2001, 2). Thus tasks and assessment criteria notionally operating in workplaces come to be recontextualised (Bernstein 2000) and simulated in the educational setting. Such links between higher education and workplaces are particularly evident around professional 'communication skills'. Cameron (2000) argues that oral communication has become one of the key skills in today's economy and enterprise culture and that the particular regimes of talk are being demanded in workplaces that are influencing how and what is being taught in universities. These 'skills' have become a new form of cultural capital with knowledge redefined in terms of competence.

The crucial point for this discussion is the key importance of student talk in universities; talk becomes central to classroom activity whereby learning is achieved through the co-construction of knowledge between students and lecturers, or enabled through group tasks. Curricula and assessment reflect greater emphasis on 'authentic' learning and communication genres that replicate workplaces, especially oral communication.

Into this talkative mix, Australia now recruits almost a fifth of its students from overseas (ABS 2007), many of whom use English as an additional language (EAL). Research on EAL students using their second language to perform publicly reports performance anxiety related to loss of face and fears of incomprehensibility (Horwitz 2001), with the risk of reticence and silence (Tsui 1996). Equally students' contributions may be complicated by an initial lack of knowledge about the local conventions around communicative events (Mason 1994). Classrooms that purposefully mix domestic and international students for groupwork in the name of 'internationalisation' (Doherty 2008) may encounter such confounding risks.

This paper is interested in the assessment of oracy and chooses to focus particularly on student talk. Most research on academic discourse has focussed on literacy demands, and academic listening in the traditional lecture (for example, Ferris and Tagg, 1996, Flowerdew 1994) to a lesser degree, but our focus here is on talk which is often taken for granted. We aim to foreground and problematise talk; its current roles and complexities in university curriculum, teaching and assessment. We report on the oracy demands in two large, first-year, first-semester compulsory courses in two disciplines – business and information technology. Both disciplines maintain strong links to their industries and typically attract large enrolments of international students (AEI 2008). The lectures and tutorials observed emphasised interaction and participation enacted through student talk. The assessment designs required respectively a group project with a written outcome and a group oral presentation. This paper will analyse the oracy demands, that is, the spoken genres, in both courses through the following questions:

- What were the oracy features and demands of the assessment tasks?
- What was the intention behind the lecturers' design on student talk for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment?

- What criteria did the lecturers use to assess students' performances in the tasks requiring speaking?

The paper is presented in five sections. The literature review introduces the concept of oracy and the contributions and gaps in the literature on oracy in higher education. We then outline a conceptual frame for assessment, curriculum and pedagogy, and the place of oracy within this nexus. The third section introduces the empirical study and profiles the assessment designs of the two undergraduate courses. The discussion contrasts the oracy demands in the design of the two courses. The conclusion draws implications of engaging explicitly with talk in the undergraduate context.

Literature review

Understanding oracy in education

'Oracy' can be defined as 'the ability to use the oral skills of speaking and listening' (Wilkinson 1965, 13) and their interplay in verbal interaction. The counterpoint is literacy which involves written language and the skills of reading and writing. Wilkinson argues that oracy should be as 'central' to education as literacy and numeracy: 'a condition of learning in all subjects' (p. 58). MacLure (1988) distinguished between two approaches to oracy in education: 'oracy for learning' (p. 3) and 'oracy as a competence' (p.5), that is, the distinction 'between oracy as a medium of learning in all subjects, and oracy as a subject in its own right' (p.2). The former approach can be associated with the shift to more constructivist modes of learning. The latter required 'the assessment of oral skills and competences in their own right, rather than as a vehicle or expression of learning in other curriculum subjects' (MacLure 1988, 5). MacLure described approaches for an explicit oracy curriculum which typically aimed to simulate contexts requiring certain types of oral texts

which students practiced through role-play. She summarises the critique around this pedagogy: '... the major problem, of course, is the unavoidably make-believe nature of the activities themselves' (MacLure 1988, 7). Oracy as a curricular goal has emerged more recently in the higher education sector, but its treatment is similarly distributed between these two approaches, and the same critique can be made of recontextualised 'authentic' tasks invoking imaginary workplace settings.

There is a strong body of research on classroom discourse and spoken interaction between teachers and students in school settings, in particular, the interaction pattern of Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) which characterises much classroom discourse. In IRE the teacher dominates the talk by undertaking both the initiation and evaluation roles (see Edwards and Westgate 1994). More constructivist approaches however have reduced this teacher dominance and increased student responsibility for initiation and evaluation, particularly within independent group tasks with 'more emphasis on processes and strategies for learning and doing' (Cazden 2001, 5). In such classrooms, students engage in more talk and greater varieties of talk.

While university classroom discourse exhibits similar patterns to those in schools, the literature on higher education features little work explicitly foregrounding talk and thus fails to benefit from this rich tradition in classroom discourse analysis. Recent work in higher education alludes to the importance of collaboration and interaction for learning (for example, Dall'Alba 2005; Hawe 2007; Sainsbury and Walker 2008), yet rarely acknowledges oracy demands, one exception being Sainsbury and Walker's (2009). Their study of collaboration in testing identified verbalization and argument as powerful vehicles for clarifying thinking, developing shared thinking and promoting learning. The research presented here purposefully focuses on designs on talk to address this gap.

Assessing oral tasks

Elsewhere literature on higher education assessment reports a number of challenges associated with emerging oral assessment practices. Cooper (2005) and Joughin (2007) raise the concern that while many students are tested on oral skills, these skills are not taught or practiced adequately, threatening validity. Cooper (2005) argues that reliability is also threatened in the assessment of oracy tasks because, despite detailed criteria, consistency can be difficult. Joughin (1998) reports further threats to reliability: little formal structure given to the oral presentation; poorly prepared examiners; and lack of moderation. Similarly, Langan et al. (2005) suggest a single rating from only one teacher can threaten reliability. Where Cooper (2005) argues that peer feedback can alleviate the inconsistency of one assessor, Smyth (2004) argues that self- and peer-assessment are also pedagogically beneficial as learners participate as 'team players'. However, despite its popularity (Langan et al. 2005), peer assessment is considered insufficiently accurate. Magin and Helmore (2001) suggest combining peer assessment ratings with teacher ratings to produce more reliable assessment. Another challenge for oral assessment in higher education is achieving sufficient feedback, particularly for large cohorts (Cooper 2005) where formative feedback is often absent. Oracy demands embedded in university group projects have received little explicit attention. Oracy processes in group assessment projects tend to be subsumed by the written product and in many cases the grade reflects the written product rather than the process of the task (Kuisma 2007). As a result, oral skills or contributions to the group task typically contribute little towards each student's final grade (Kuisma 2007).

Group oral presentations may present as a means to manage oral assessment with large cohorts (Cooper 2005) but equally raise a number of concerns, including the dynamics of working in groups; the validity and reliability of group tasks; and the parity of work

completed by members (Almond 2009; Cheng and Warren 2000; Straus and U 2007). Where members have diverse backgrounds and differing cultural expectations of what collaborative group work entails, Sweeney, Weaven and Herington (2008) report possible discontent if the same grade is applied to all students. Research with university EAL students required to work on group tasks with domestic students reached similar conclusions. Leki (2001) found that domestic university students in the US were reluctant to include EAL students in major decision-making roles and treated them as 'novices', even though the EAL students saw themselves as competent. Kettle (2005) and Sweeney et al. (2008) report anxiety about language comprehensibility and self-representation mitigating EAL students' participation in mixed groups. Straus and U (2007) warn that these second language-related factors can further diminish the validity and reliability of group assessment.

The degree of authenticity of an assessment task gauges the extent to which the design of the task simulates a 'real' situation, and how students frame the task. Oral tasks which attempt to simulate a professional setting are often deemed authentic, personally relevant, and rich learning experiences in which learners gain understanding of the content (Joughin 2007). However, presenting a task as assessment can change the way that students respond (Spence-Brown 2001). Questions have also been raised about the authenticity hence validity of such tasks: Spence-Brown (2001, 465) argues that 'the relationship of the criteria used to judge performances to real-world judgements in particular domains is clearly crucial to validity' and yet this relationship is virtually ignored in discussions of authenticity. Jacoby and McNamara (1999, 215) similarly maintain that a definition of validity must consider the 'issue of the provenance of the criteria, or their relationship to criteria used in the real world.' They argue for the development of such criteria from studies in professional settings. In this regard, Brown (2004) highlights the tension between the desire for increased authenticity in

assessment tasks (for example, group projects simulating professional teamwork) and aspects of reliability, particularly the need for demonstrable performance of competency by the individual.

The literature reviewed is limited in terms of reporting small scale studies in diverse settings, and fractured in terms of the variety of theoretical orientations. However it serves to capture the popularity of groupwork and oral assessment in higher education and highlight associated problems in terms of: balancing validity and reliability; managing participation in diverse cohorts; claiming authenticity in task design and criteria; and whether the assessment of oracy and group work is linked to an explicit curriculum and pedagogy that build such skills.

Theoretical frame

Formal educational programs involve three 'message systems' – pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation: 'Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realization of this knowledge on the part of the taught' (Bernstein 1971, 47). While these three dimensions of any educational design will work together, Broadfoot (1996, 8) highlights 'the social role of assessment', being the power of formal summative assessment to ultimately control what happens. By analytically distinguishing between the three message systems in each course, this study examines whether what ultimately counts in assessment is supported by what counts in the curriculum and the pedagogy, or whether assessment targets performance of skills/knowledge that are not explicitly addressed in the curriculum or pedagogical design. The concept of 'hidden curriculum,' widely used to refer to what students learn in educational settings beyond the formal stated curriculum (for example, Apple 1971), could be complemented with that of 'hidden assessment', to refer to that which is effectively

assessed regardless of whether it is addressed in the curriculum. The linguistic proficiency demanded by any curriculum often risks being 'implicit' or 'tacit' (Bernstein 2000, 199) in pedagogy. Where the 'oracy as a competence' approach (MacLure 1988) helps to bring talk explicitly to the surface, an 'oracy for learning' approach risks hidden assessment of oracy demands.

The empirical study

This study was designed as case studies of two first year university courses, the first in Business and Management (referred to as "Course A") and the second in Information Technology (referred to as "Course B"). The qualitative case study offers a rich mode of inquiry 'when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (Yin 2003, 1) such as the intersection of pedagogical trends described above. For this study, these particular courses were purposefully selected firstly because their position as entry points into their programs made salient any socialisation of students into the expectations and oral genres of the discipline. Secondly, the courses were core, not electives, in their programs thus involved large numbers of students, with sizeable teaching teams. As a result, each pedagogic design had to be explicit enough to be communicated across teaching teams. Observational data was collected in both courses in the form of video-recordings of the first four weeks of lectures and tutorials, and, in the case of Course B, the final two tutorials which were dedicated to oral presentations. Hard copy and online course documents were collected. In addition, semi-structured interviews with the course coordinators were conducted and transcribed. These interviews included 'stimulated recall' (Keith 1988) inviting the lecturers to explain their thinking and/or reaction to certain observed events. The two cases are presented here as the lecturers' interpretations of assessment trends foregrounding oracy within their disciplinary frames. Any comparison is not intended to establish a

'better'/'worse' case but rather to draw out similarities and differences that illuminate the oracy demands of each course.

Course A and its implicit oracy demands

Course A was a 13 week on-campus business course with one two-hour lecture and one one-hour tutorial per week for students. Approximately 1000 students enrolled in this course; 5% were international students. Each tutorial class had 20 to 30 students. Each tutorial was structured around set tasks and readings that students were expected to prepare each week. The assessment involved three compulsory tasks: a group project (30%), short answer exercises (20%) and a final exam (50%), the first two of particular interest given their embedded oracy demands.

For the group project, students conducted a simulated business investigation in self-selected teams of three, then submitted a written report which was assessed against explicit criteria. The task description stated that '*the assessment item is designed to build and assess teamwork*', with each student as '*project officer*', producing a frame of role play and 'make-believe' (MacLure 1988, 7). The report criteria focused on content knowledge and research skills, with the final criterion being '*professionalism*'. All students had to submit a peer evaluation form to '*evaluate their partners*' on a one to seven scale, with regard to attendance, contribution, initiative, doing their fair share, and maintaining contact. The assessment brief stated '*this is a small team exercise*', and that teams needed to settle issues and plan for completion by the due date. In the four tutorials observed, there were brief opportunities for groups to work together or ask questions of the tutor. There was no formal instruction or further resourcing on how to conduct and manage team projects. The majority of group interaction took place outside scheduled classes, hence students' interactions

received no formative feedback. The oracy demands of the process were subsumed by the grade for the written product as flagged by Kuisma (2007).

For the short answer exercises, students were to submit their tutorial exercises at the end of selected tutorials, after having the chance to benefit '*via active participation and discussion among peers and tutor'*. The task brief described this design as assessing '*understanding of subject matter, problem solving, and active listening'*. The assessment outline advised that they would '*benefit by active participation in tutorials'*, '*the frequency and quality of input to discussion'* and that '*marks are contingent on tutorial attendance'*, thus spoken interaction was critically important to the design.

The tutorials observed were conducted as rapidly paced 'IRE', that is, teacher initiation/ question, followed by student response, then teacher evaluation of that response, working through an oral 'marking' of the weekly exercise. If no student offered an adequate response, the tutor would offer instruction around the relevant point, then resume IRE questioning. One of the risks of IRE is that a response by one student tends to be treated as representative of all students. A teacher can thus gain the wrong impression of understanding across the class by taking only the responses from confident (first language) students who volunteer their answers, which was the pattern observed in these classes. Secondly, the point in an IRE sequence tended to be communicated in a student's elided (shortened) response turn, and not always reiterated as full syntax in the teacher's evaluation move (for example, *I: 'What does this mean for business?' R: 'Bad risk.' E: 'that's right!').* Thus for other students, the thread of meaning had to be pieced together as the interaction ricocheted around the room, leaving the content point quite elusive. In Course A, with each weekly task potentially being assessed, the listening (including EAL) students had to follow this rapid-fire, multivocal dialogue closely to improve their answers prior to submission at the end of the class.

There were opportunities for students to raise questions (‘*Any questions before we start*?’), however, these moments were brief interludes offered in liminal moments before topic shifts. Elsewhere, the IRE structure gave the tutor tight control over the pacing and topic of the talk in the limited time available, making it difficult for students to raise questions. In one observed episode, a group of second language students had a question for the tutor, but class time finished. The tutor invited them to ‘*walk with me’* across campus to his next class, however the group were separated from the tutor in a crowded foyer and never had their question asked, let alone answered. The coordinating lecturer reported a point of ‘*saturation*’ with student email enquiries about the tutorial tasks, in which she ‘*saw a lot of anxiety*’. The lecturer responded by offering time for students to individually ask questions in the lectures – at break, and afterwards: *one of the changes I made this time, was rather than run the lectures for 2 hours, I actually scaled it back a little bit and left about 20 minutes. I also made sure that I didn’t leave during the lecture for my 10 minute break.* Many students were observed to take advantage of this ‘oral’ access, and queued at the front of the lecture theatre to have their questions answered.

Thus both assessment tasks in Course A had considerable oracy demands built into their designs, without explicit curricular resourcing to scaffold or develop the competencies required. In her interview, Course A’s lecturer shared her own biography of once being an international student and the oracy challenges: ‘*I must confess when I first came to Australia I thought I knew English, but I couldn’t understand most of the people.*’ She also acknowledged the added value that oracy skills in English give the international student in the job market: ‘*the feedback that I get back from them is that it’s their language skills are highly valued.’* She felt such proficiency needed ongoing attention for improvement: ‘*I think we need some innovative solutions to perhaps say, “well, even though they may have done the*

IELTS[1] *test or something else, that is not sufficient"'* and that such learning should continue *'… for everyone'*.

When explaining the design behind the group assessment task, the lecturer cited two motivations – the simulation of professional communication processes, and the more pragmatic pressures of managing tutor workloads: *'it's a type of authentic assessment item. They're really done in groups, in my own working experience ... but the other one is being pragmatic in terms of how much I can ask of my tutors.'* She then described the percentage of groups that fall apart over the project, and how such group members suffer penalties under the 'professionalism' criterion:

> *Around about 12 groups out of the 300 odd do have difficulties … I call them in and I try to mediate. Occasionally if there's no possibility of mediation, then I say, 'you'll have to do it on your own', and focus more on professionalism, so if a group breaks up, well that's not there, so we do penalize them for that. The other thing is that well, group work is a core graduate capability, so they lose a few marks there.*

By her account, such breakdown denoted the absence of 'professionalism' but was not used to flag the need for additional instruction or scaffolding in such skills. In an alternative frame, the group breakdown might constitute the teachable moment in which to explore possible scripts about how to work through disagreement, engage all members, and regroup. By assessing skills that were not explicitly developed in the curriculum, the exercise became an assessment of what prior skills and dispositions students brought to the task. This becomes an issue of validity and hidden assessment: the underlying construct that was being assessed was not explicitly taught in the course.

Course B and its explicit oracy demands

In contrast to Course A's implicit oracy demands, Course B's design involved an explicit curriculum around oracy skills for the information technology (IT) work setting – their naming, presentation, guided practice and assessment. Course B was also a thirteen week on-campus program with a one-hour lecture, a two-hour tutorial plus an additional one-hour workshop. The course had approximately 360 students, of whom about 6% were international students. Tutorials and workshops had 20 to 30 students in each class. The lecture programme included guest speakers who specialised in communication and/or the IT profession on topics such as team dynamics, researching business needs, managing conflict in teams, professional practices and ethics, presentation skills and professional literacies. The course objectives were explicitly linked to the authentic demands of the industry. In the course outline, direct reference was made to effective communication, teamwork, conflict resolution and industry-specific technical skills and knowledge.

Assessment in Course B consisted of three tasks, each with multiple parts. Assessment Task One (10%) was about team management and required a number of on-line activities including the minutes of team meetings, team evaluations and team reflections. These tasks were to be completed individually with reference to a group project the students were involved in. Assessment Task Two (30%) was a report to be completed individually on skills acquired during the team project. The final assessment task was the group project itself (60%). This involved individual and group components and required the submission of tasks throughout the semester. Working as a team, the students were required to analyse, design and build a product for an imaginary client. Assessed project 'deliverables' included a team agreement, analyses of client needs, project design, and an oral presentation and demonstration of the design. The final presentations were staged as a simulated competition between teams before a panel of the tutor with two other members of academic staff. The

assessment criteria included: the extent to which the presentation was structured into introduction, body and conclusion; vocal style; non-verbal style; audience contact; visual aids; persuasiveness; and participation as both an individual and a team member. The oracy demands in Course B were thus explicitly addressed in the curricular, pedagogical and assessment design, with the expectation that groupwork participation would improve as a result of explicit sequenced teaching. Despite the emphasis on the team presentation in the course design, it was worth only 8% in the 20% allocated to the project.

The lectures in Course B were typically the traditional monologue with students listening and making notes. Tutorials were more dialogic and interactive. Each tutorial was carefully paced with a mix of activities orchestrating student participation for the explicit development of communication skills with frequent groupwork activities involving role-plays and hypothetical situations. Of the six tutorials observed, five explicitly addressed the oracy demands of team work, with coaching in skills such as chairing and participating in meetings, negotiating differences and managing different personality types. Activities were linked to the assessment tasks and students were reminded that the skills being taught related not only to course assessment, but also to future work environments.

The lecturer indicated that each week's lecture involved the presentation of different generic skills building towards the final group presentations: '*Week 11, week 12, week 13 was all about training for communicating orally*'. The second last tutorial offered the chance for groups to rehearse their final presentation and receive formative feedback. The lecturer emphasized that the purpose of this session was also to assess their peers. In her interview, the lecturer stressed the importance of peer feedback: '*coming to see each other in different lights…they can actually give each other a bit of feedback, accept it, know it's constructive'*. Only one of the six groups in the observed tutorial attended this session, thus the opportunity for formative feedback was not realised for most students.

The lecturer believed that many of the students were initially unaware of the value of talk within the professional field and had to be convinced of its importance: '*students start off not valuing talk. It takes of lot of convincing to get them to see it. My hope is that at the end of the semester they do see the value. I know for a fact that industry values graduates with talking capacity'*. She described her overall approach as making the authentic link to industry to students to the importance of talk as an integral part of work:

> *We try to take the students through the journey of building a [product] and how talk creates a role in building a [product] …. That's why we learn about talk and the Week One lecture was intended to show … how industry perceives the importance of talk; why you need to know how to talk regardless of what you do.*

In regard to task authenticity, Lecturer B felt that the group presentation was *'very real in that….there will be a lot of instances in the [industry] career that whatever path they take they will have to present an idea and bid for it*'. However, the pedagogic simulation of authenticity created distortions in the criteria which analysed the oral performance with no reference to its content matter. The assessment criteria were inherited by the lecturer when she became coordinator, and she expressed a degree of discomfort using them as a rubric: '*I personally sometimes find this gridding system … I don't like them very much to be honest*'. She felt that the itemised rating scales did not always accord with her more intuitive, holistic impression of performance on the task: '*sometimes I notice that my inner gut feeling says "this is really worth a credit" … but if I follow the CRA I end up with a "C" sometimes or with a distinction'*. This had implications for reliability, but was managed by the presence of more than one rater for each presentation: '*we don't have the resources to video record but … we allocate… at least two or three markers*'.

Discussion

In some ways the two case study courses share similar premises. Both were designed with an close eye to the authentic oracy demands of their target industry; both were interested in invoking forms of oracy to enrich the learning environment; and both chose the group project as a carefully staged learning experience and assessment task. Similarly, both courses used peer review as a device to promote reflection on the skills demanded in group work. In other ways these two case studies differed in their treatment of oracy demands. Course A was characterised by an 'implicit design' whereby oracy demands were embedded and implicit in the process of meeting assessment outcomes. On the other hand, Course B exhibited an 'explicit design' through which communication skills prioritising talk were presented, scaffolded, coached and practised by students, before being assessed. Table I summarises the analysis of the two case study courses' design on oracy.

Table 1: Comparative designs on oracy

Oracy manifested ...	**Course A Business**	**Course B Information Technology**
in the curriculum	Oracy for learning	Oracy for learning + Oracy as competence
in pedagogy	More dialogic lecture IRE tutorials	Monologic lecture Tutorials scaffold teamwork
in assessment:	Oracy as process	Oracy as process Oracy as product
- task design:	Simulation of authentic task with a written report as product Talk generated, but not explicitly scaffolded, monitored or assessed Peer assessment incorporated	Simulation of authentic task with an oral presentation as product Talk generated, and explicitly scaffolded, monitored and assessed Peer assessment incorporated
- criteria	'professionalism'	Explicit criteria re oracy performance
- oracy demands	Implicit	Explicit

In Course A, the short answer tutorial tasks and the written group assignment both required sharp oracy skills – to benefit from the IRE talk in tutorials, and to contribute to group processes in the assignment. The case profile and literature review pointed out how

both forms of oracy could be problematic or challenging for the EAL student. These skills however formed part of the 'hidden assessment', mitigating and confounding the students' assessable performance in the final written product. While an educational analysis might point to the discontinuities between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, such implicit embedding of oracy demands could in fact be considered a more 'authentic' simulation of workplace practices and the criteria imposed in industry settings. In Course B, every effort was made to avoid 'hidden assessment', that is, to ensure that what was being assessed had been addressed in the curriculum and explored in the pedagogy. The final presentations were allocated two two-hour tutorials in the 13 week program – one for rehearsal with formative feedback, the second for the assessable performance. This curricular spotlight produced criteria that rigorously reflected the curriculum, perhaps at the cost of more 'authentic' criteria that would reflect the business of the industry scenario being simulated. Using MacLure's (1988) distinction, Course A was pursuing 'oracy for learning' while Course B was also pursuing 'oracy as a competence'.

More generally, the case studies highlight in their different ways that talk takes time. Designing for oracy processes or products requires either significant investments of class time, as in Course B, or out-of-class time, as in Course A. On the other hand, the strategy of designing group products and processes helped accommodate time constraints by reducing tutors' marking loads, as the lecturer in Course A candidly admitted. However, this shifted considerable process time to students' out-of-class time, and made formative feedback difficult.

The analysis of the two case study courses and the design for oracy in each course's curriculum, pedagogy and assessment suggests that this is complex emergent territory that resists simplistic pronouncements of what might constitute 'best' practice. 'Good' practice will be sustainable practice, with judicious use of time within institutional constraints. Course

B had carved the necessary time in the broader program to devote to an explicit curriculum on professional oracy and its assessment, as promoted in the research literature. Course A had similar goals in mind, but without the curricular time. Through its pedagogy and assessment design, Course A was staging more talk, but without the curricular treatment, more talk was not necessarily better talk. Students in the groups that irretrievably broke down and thus failed the 'professionalism' criteria did not have the chance to learn what they needed to know about negotiating group processes, though they were ultimately assessed on this.

Conclusion

This paper explored the nexus between some current trends in Australian higher education, being:

1. increased emphasis on communication and collaboration skills as desirable graduate attributes;
2. shifts away from 'lecturing' to 'teaching' and more social constructivist pedagogies
3. the increasing value placed on student talk – in curricula, pedagogy and assessment;
4. growing interest in authentic assessment and the extent to which the 'authentic' demands of the workplace can be simulated in educational settings; and
5. increasing enrolments of international students who speak English as an additional language into these talkative programs.

These trends are not necessarily compatible. The turn to social constructivist pedagogies has energised university classroom interactions, however we argued that oracy is deeply and problematically implicated in these trends and warrants closer research. We want to foreground the integral role of talk in higher education and to encourage mindfulness and awareness of talk as it is operating, or not, in classroom interactions – who is speaking; who is not; what do students have to know, do and be to participate in the oracy demands of the

task; what scaffolding and assistance is required; how can the embedded oracy competence legitimately be assessed?

Our case studies profiled assessment tasks that in one course had high implicit oracy demands with little formal resourcing through the curriculum, while the other had high oracy demands that were made explicit, resourced and assessed in a final performance. The lecturer in the second course identified an initial lack of conviction on the part of students about the value of talk but was hopeful that with time and a greater understanding of industry expectations, they would come to see the value. We are similarly arguing for more talk about talk. Given the talkative environment that university classrooms are increasingly becoming, it is crucial that teachers understand the demands inherent in classroom talk, and how it is implicated in assessment tasks.

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